

Columbia City • Hillman City • Genesee *Neighborhood Plan*

February 1999

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Neighborhood Planning Office



Prepared for:

Columbia City • Hillman City • Genesee Planning Committee

Prepared by:

MAKERS architecture and urban design

Sponsored by:

City of Seattle Neighborhood Planning Office

Columbia City/ Hillman City/ Genesee

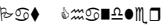
Neighborhood Plan

February 1999

Planning Team:

A team of consultants provided technical expertise to assist the Planning Committee in developing the neighborhood plan. City of Seattle staff provided administrative and strategic support as well as in-depth review of the neighborhood plan during its development.

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Planning Committee Co-Chairs:

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- Eric Tweit

Planning Committee:

The Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Planning Committee is responsible for ensuring that the entire community has the opportunity to participate in the neighborhood planning process and that identified stakeholder groups are involved in the review of planning products. To this end the committee has taken responsibility for providing community forums for involvement throughout the whole process and for making planning documents available and accessible to the public.

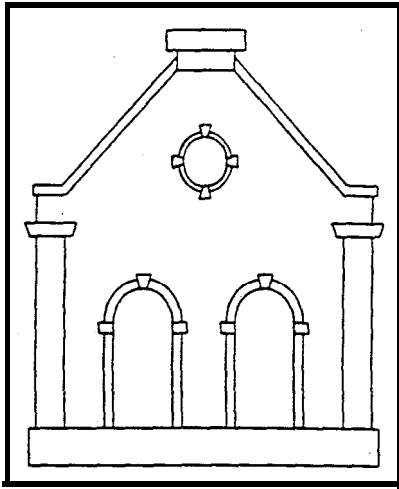


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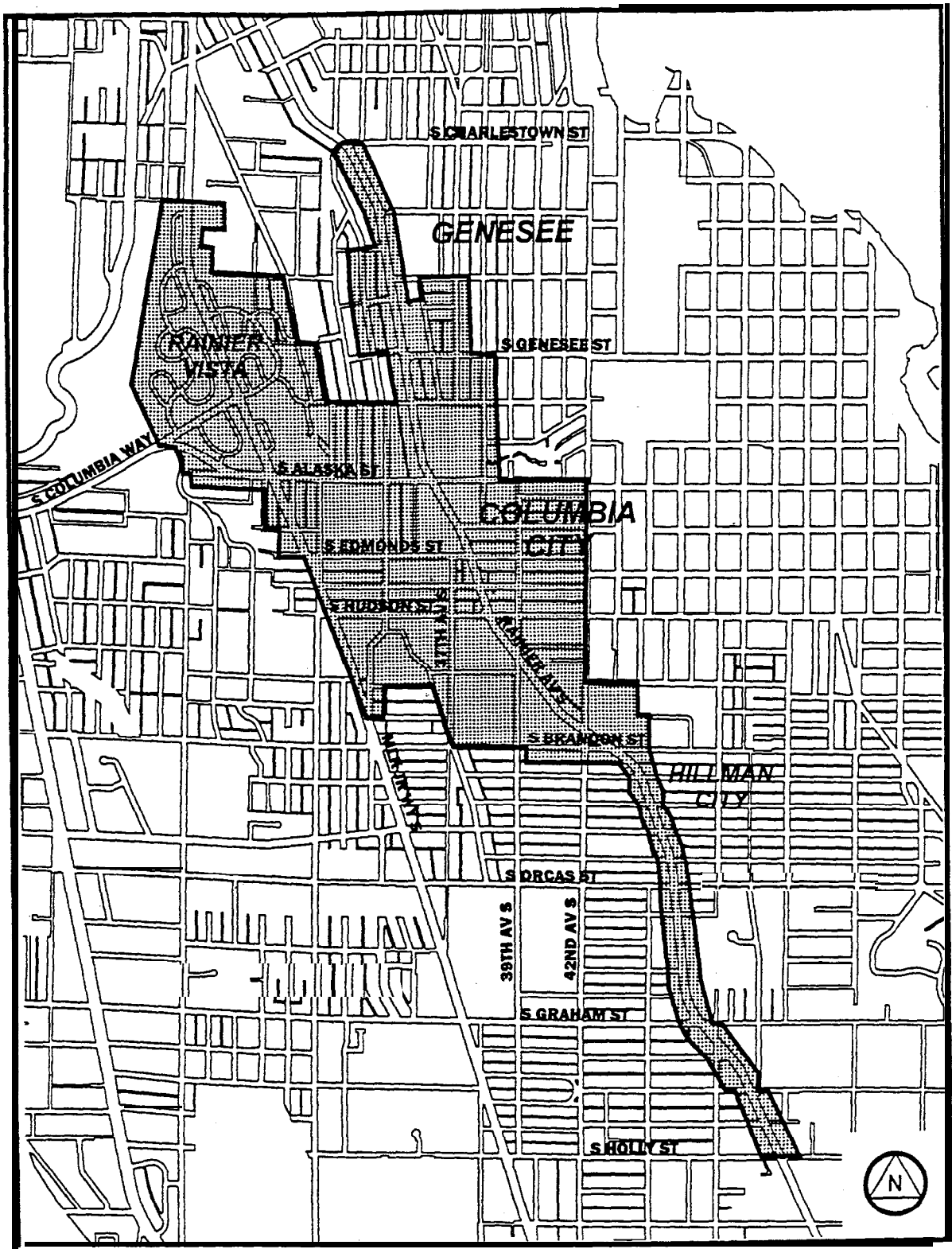
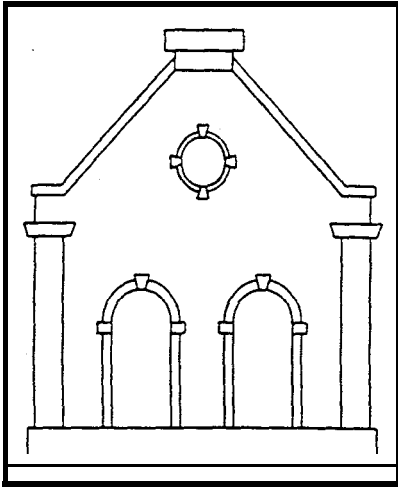


figure 1: Planning Area Boundaries



Executive Summary

A. Vision Statement

Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee is envisioned to be:

- **Attractive:** *A clean, attractive community where both public and private property is well maintained, parks and open spaces are preserved and enhanced, and recreational and cultural opportunities are many.*
- **Healthy:** *Streets with pedestrian walkways and bike paths that are safe, attractive, maintained, and well lit; a stable, healthy residential neighborhood where people choose to stay and raise families and housing is affordable.*
- **Vibrant:** *Interesting, attractive, and vibrant commercial areas linked through transit to other neighborhoods and employment centers within Seattle and the greater area; a community in which reinvestment and entrepreneurship are ongoing and apparent.*
- **Diverse:** *A community that takes pride in the ethnic and economic diversity of the Rainier Valley and promotes a stabilization of the community that retains diverse households.*
- **Connected:** *A strong connection among neighbors, with increased access to living-wage job opportunities for local residents.*

The vision statement above, formulated by the Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Planning Committee during Phase I of the planning process and refined in Phase II, summarizes the founding principles on which this plan is based. The plan itself translates the ideals expressed in the vision statement into a set of implementable goals, policies, and (most specifically) actions that the City, community, and other participants will take to achieve the vision. In translating their general vision into specific recommendations for action, planning participants identified overarching strategies which serve to organize the individual actions.

B. Key Strategies

Throughout the two-year neighborhood planning process, the community identified the themes and priorities that are most critical to the Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee neighborhoods. These principles are the basis of all of the Neighborhood Plan's recommendations. In order to achieve the community's goals, the neighborhood plan's recommendations focus on integrated geographic district plans and key projects and programs. These priorities are:

1. **Strengthen the Columbia City Core as a historic, mixed-use, pedestrian oriented community focus.** Columbia City is the oldest neighborhood in the Rainier Valley and has the opportunity to be South Seattle's premier community-based center for cultural and commercial activity. The plan recommends actions to strengthen this role while maintaining the "small town" historic scale.
2. **Enhance the Rainier Corridor as a series of commercial districts and neighborhood centers along an efficient transportation corridor.** The plan's actions encourage the development of new housing between the cores while strengthening the commercial districts and activity centers. Street improvements are intended to identify and celebrate the individual districts, promote pedestrian activity and safety, and retain transportation efficiency.
3. **Strengthen the quality of existing residential areas and provide opportunities and incentives for market rate housing.** The housing actions focus on stimulating new multifamily housing development which are assets to the community, and which support the revitalization and strengthening of commercial centers.
4. **Optimize opportunities to make Sound Transit's rail line a positive community asset.** In recognizing the proposed rail line's likely far reaching impacts, the community established route selection criteria relevant to the Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Vision Statement, recommended an alignment (37th Avenue S. tunnel), light rail mitigation measures, and specific transportation strategies to enhance circulation and mobility.
5. **Improve the appearance of the MLK corridor while retaining its function as an efficient transportation corridor.** Plan recommendations aim to reverse the pattern of disinvestment along the corridor by encouraging new housing construction, enhancing pedestrian access, and improving safety.
6. **Stabilize and enhance the Columbia City area as a safe and clean neighborhood in which to live, work, and recreate.** Actions and measures such as improving street lighting in business districts, aggressive enforcement of nuisance codes, and restoring community-based policing are high neighborhood priorities directed towards improving the image and livability of the area.



MLK Corridor

Improve the appearance of the MLK Corridor while retaining its function as an efficient transportation corridor:

- Streetscape and pedestrian improvements.

Housing

Strengthen the quality of existing residential areas and provide opportunities and incentives for market rate housing:

- Zoning revisions.
- Housing programs.
- Development incentives.

Public Safety and Community Livability

Stabilize and enhance the Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee areas as safe and clean neighborhoods in which to live, work, and recreate:

- Restore and expand community-based policing.
- Aggressively enforce property maintenance and nuisance codes.
- Support local arts activities and programs.

Rainier Corridor

Enhance the Rainier corridor as a series of commercial districts and neighborhood centers along an efficient transportation corridor:

- Zoning revisions.
- Redevelopment.
- Gateway features.

Transportation

Optimize opportunities to make Sound Transits Rail Line a positive community asset:

- Develop 37th Ave tunnel route.
- Provide strong neighborhood links to light rail system.
- Minimize light rail construction impacts.
- Improve north-south bicycle access.

Columbia City Community Focus

Strengthen the Columbia City Core as a historic, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented community focus:

- Underground light rail station.
- Zoning revisions.
- Redevelopment of key sites.
- Street Improvements.
- Park Improvements.

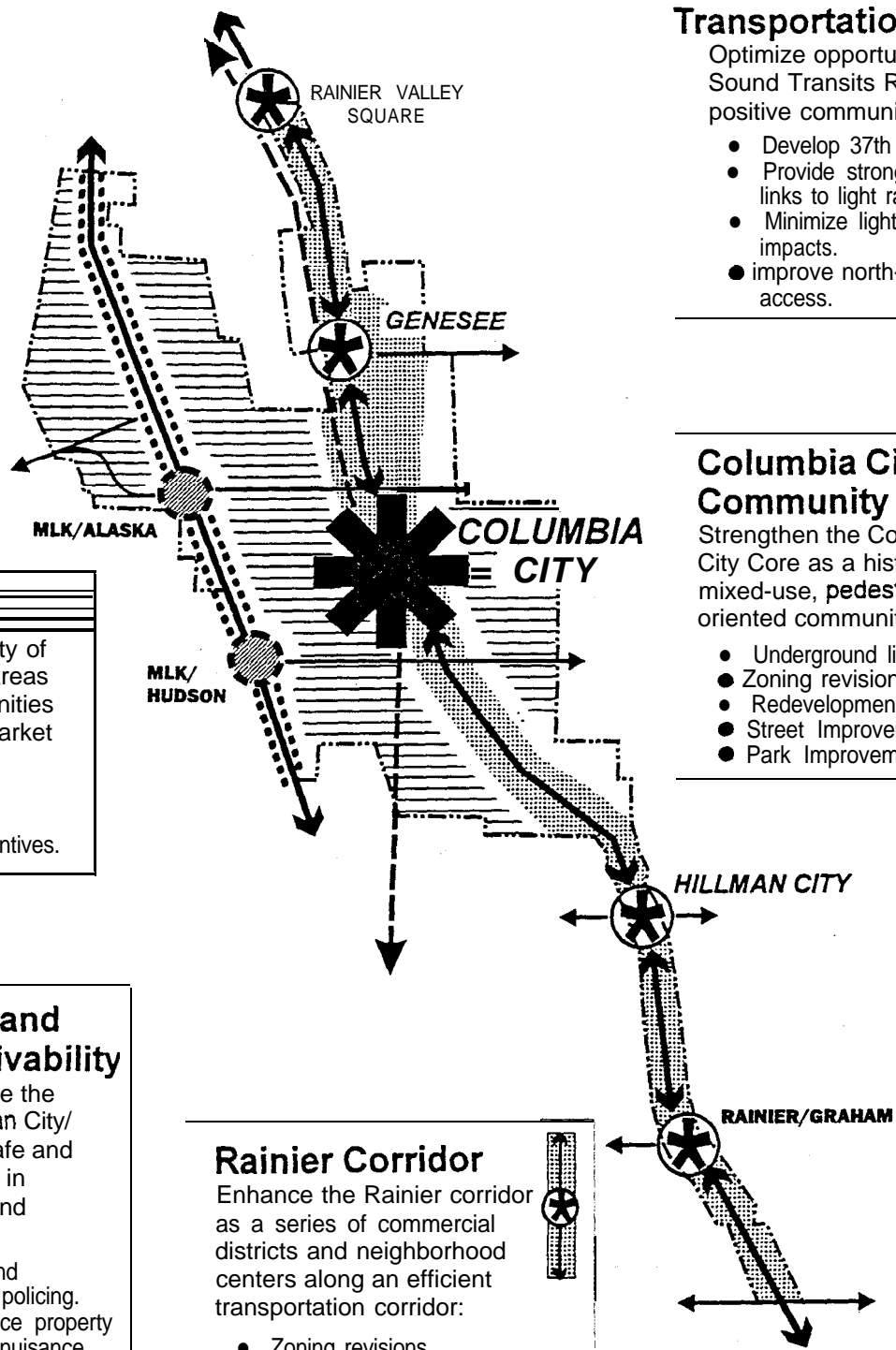


Figure 2: Key Strategies

C. Station Area Planning Recommendations

The development of a Sound Transit light rail transit (LRT) corridor and station within Columbia City will be the community's most important revitalization opportunity in the early 21st century. To realize this opportunity, the community and the City, in cooperation with Sound Transit, must plan a focused set of actions that minimizes the intrusive aspects of the LRT corridor and maximizes the positive redevelopment and transportation related benefits.

The Columbia City/Hillman City/Genesee Neighborhood Plan has been prepared prior to Sound Transit's selection of an LRT corridor alignment or station location. Because of the uncertainty regarding a critical element in the community's future, the plan's recommendations for the Columbia City core and the MLK corridor have necessarily been less specific than if there were a solid corridor and station design proposal. However, the top priority for community and City efforts during the next several years must be to continue to plan, fund, and construct the civic improvements and private redevelopment to complement the LRT station for the benefit of the community. To this end, the following recommendations assume highest priority. Some recommendations are to be accomplished regardless of the station location, while others depend on a specific station site. In general, if the station is sited at the Columbia City core, the focus of efforts should be to construct the indicated public improvements and joint development projects in the core and to improve the MLK streetscape residential community along that corridor. If MLK is selected as a station site, substantially more extensive traffic, aesthetic, and environmental improvements, as well as redevelopment projects, will be needed along the MLK corridor, and substantially more extensive public investment must be made in the core to maintain the community's commercial and civic focus.

Key station area actions regardless of which station site is selected:

- Redevelop the Columbia Plaza site.
- Provide curb, gutter, sidewalk, and street tree improvements on residential streets within the Columbia City core.
- Improve pedestrian access between Rainier Vista and the Columbia City business district.
- Strengthen Columbia Park and expand the Columbia City Library.
- Give special consideration to private property loss compensation and assist in relocating residents.
- Facilitate the following zoning changes:
 - Areas zoned L-2 and L3-RC west of Rainier Avenue, between S. Lilac Street and S. Genesee Street, to LDT.
 - Reduce the height limit at the Columbia Plaza/Seafirst Bank site from 65 to 40 feet.
- Develop car/bus drop-off sites close to the transit station.
- Conduct a detailed transportation analysis of all major north-south transportation corridors.
- Develop a bus loop system connecting area neighborhoods to the transit station.
- Maintain current mobility standards along Martin Luther King Jr. Way.
- Improve bicycle access on Martin Luther King Jr. Way or Rainier Avenue.



Key station area actions if the Columbia City station site is selected:

- Integrate the primary station entry into the redevelopment of the Columbia Plaza site.
- Create station entries at 37th Avenue S./S. Edmunds Street and off Rainier Avenue S.
- Preserve historic streetfront buildings in Columbia City.
- Provide streetscape improvements on 37th Avenue S. (above the transit alignment), including street trees, curbs, gutters, new sidewalks, street furniture, signage, etc.
- Develop a linear park with separated pathways along the west side of Rainier Avenue north of Alaska.
- Improve the streetscape and residential community along MLK.

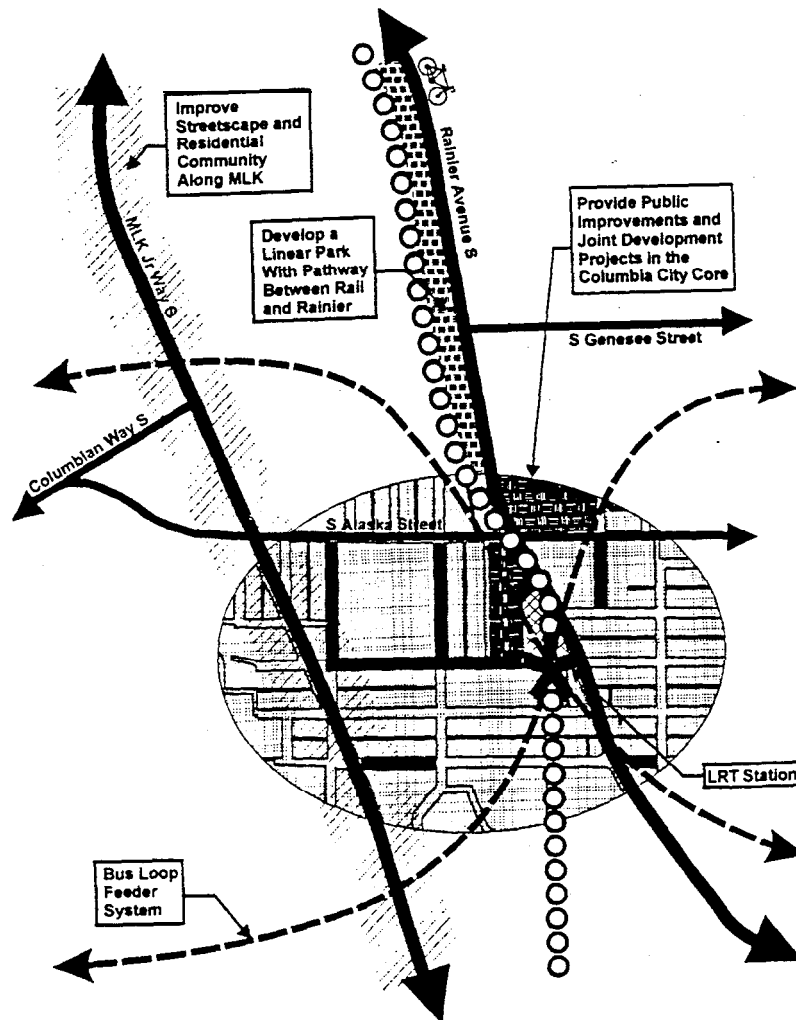


Figure 3: Columbia City Station Area Strategies

Key actions if one of the MLK station sites is selected:

- Coordinate the development of the station and alignment with the redevelopment of the Rainier Vista public housing garden community.
- Provide for streetscape and pedestrian improvements, such as widened sidewalks, landscaping, street trees, and improved sidewalks on MLK, to mitigate for rail alignment and limited street crossings.
- Provide for effective signalization and traffic control at the MLK/Alaska intersection to enhance pedestrian safety while maintaining good mobility standards.
- Explore the option of closing off 3 1st Avenue S. between Alaska and MLK to increase redevelopment opportunities.
- Explore opportunities to create a small park/open space area near the southeast corner of MLK and Alaska in conjunction with condemnation for alignment and possible closure of 3 1st Avenue S.
- Develop a stairclimb/pedestrian access from the Beacon Hill area towards the transit station.
- Add bicycle and pedestrian improvements on Columbia Way/Alaska Street west to Beacon Hill.

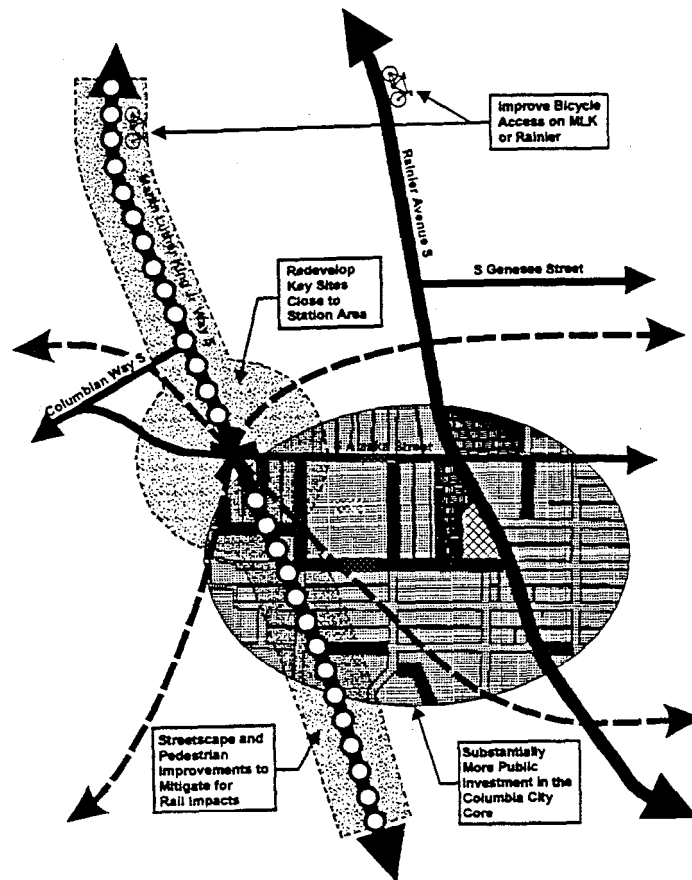


Figure 4: ML K Station Area Strategies